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Mary at Thirteen

Matthew 1:18-25

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My seven year old niece Kathryn watched one of her uncles kissing his new bride at a wedding last year. She said: "If they keep kissing like that, they're going to have a baby." She knew what most of us know about conception and pregnancy it takes two. This common sense leads many to ridicule the notion of a virgin birth. It's unscientific. It's anti- intellectual. It's outside the box. People say the Greek word should be translated 'young woman' and not 'virgin.'

The problem is that God's Word insists on a virgin birth. The break in the pattern of listing fathers in Christ's genealogy. The news of the angel that the child is conceived by the Holy Spirit. Matthew's comment that Joseph had no union with Mary until after she gave birth to Jesus. And Mary's own exclamation that she had never known (had sexual relations with) a man.

As Mark Benish and I often say in the context of *Faith Fundamentals,* the class on basic Christian doctrine we regularly offer here at CPC, a person has to decide ahead of time whether to conform oneself to the Bible or to make the Bible confirm itself to one's views. That is, do we look to the Scripture as an authority for our lives (whether we like what it says or not), or do we decide on a case-by-case basis whether we want to conform to God's Word.

As usual, this is a question of world view. Our presuppositions are often not examined, but they form the basis for our entire way of living. Does your view of the world *exclude* the supernatural? Or does your worldview allow for the God- Who- Is- Really- There?

As Carole Ann ably demonstrated in the monologue that preceded the sermon this morning, Mary felt very alone. She was pregnant with child and had not had sexual relations with any man. God Almighty had brought this to pass. Her family didn't initially believe any of this, which made her that much more alone.

This story highlights three things.

First, God is sovereign!! and active. The word 'sovereign' means that God is in charge. As much as we sometimes find this disturbing, that God is in charge of things that happen, we Reformed Presbyterians would prefer to have God in charge than to have chance in charge. And sovereignty is clearly part of what Scripture says about God. But we also believe that God is active in our world, and activity for God usually means He is speaking. I believe He is speaking a lot! He spoke in the Old Testament and in the New Testament and in the early church and in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance and in the 18th and the 19th and the 2Oth centuries, and He continues to speak (a lot) today. So, if God continues to speak, what do we need to learn to do better? Yes, we need to learn to ~. We can use the gifts of the Spirit -words of knowledge and wisdom, tongues and

prophetic words, to hear the Holy God speak, but we can also spend more time finding a quiet place, a place of solitude, in our busy day, so that we can practice the art of listening to what God is saying.

Second, God brings solutions. God worked it out with Joseph, and He worked it out with the rest of us. The name Jesus is the Greek for the Hebrew name Joshua, and Joshua in Hebrew means 'the Lord saves.' Jesus is the solution to the problem of human beings, the separation from God. Jesus is the solution to the mess caused by Adam and Eve. And Jesus stands ready to bring solutions to your problems. Does anyone have a large problem right now? Ok, about small problems? Sure, lots of hands for small problems. Let me suggest you practice the art of listening to God and get involved with Him, and watch how He brings solutions to your small problems. Maybe then you will let Him work on your big ones!

Third, and finally , God uses mystery. .We don't always understand. God answers lots of questions -how we should live, what we should do, where we should go, who we should become, but God doesn't ever answer one question. Do you know what it is? Yes, the 'why?' question. God doesn't answer 'why? '. I believe, because He uses mystery to accomplish His purposes. We are not God and we can't understand how He connects the dots. And there's the rub, the problem. Some of us refuse mystery, and those that do this, that is, refuse mystery, begin to commit what I think is the worst sin, the sin of idolatry .Idolatry is replacing God with something else, perhaps an image but more often than not, replacing God with ourselves. We decide we know best and refuse the way God works. ..we refuse the mystery .This refusal is something we must avoid.

Advent begins today. I urge you to lean into it and LOOK for God's surprising activity in your life. Listen to the sovereign and active God who is speaking, and partner with Him as He seeks to work with you to bring solutions to your problems and the problems of others. And accept and embrace His mystery, as Mary did, long ago.

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